



## “Change Yourself or Leave” – Nature of Mobile Cultures

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### „ZMĚŇ SE, NEBO ODEJDI“ – POVAHA KULTUR V POHYBU

**ABSTRAKT** Příspěvek se zabývá vztahy mezi kulturní změnou a migrací. Zvláště se zaměřuje na problematiku evoluce v rámci nomádských kultur. Východiskem je předpoklad, že fenomén změny, času a migrace jsou vzájemně úzce propojené a z určitého úhlu pohledu až totožné. Změna místa (migrace) tedy umožňuje z tohoto pohledu uniknout změně stavu (například přizpůsobit se kulturními prostředky novým podmínkám). Pohybem v krajině například nomádi do značné míry eliminují nutnost změny v čase – evoluci. Migrací se vrací to, co bylo (hojná pastva, dostatek vody, mírné klima ...), respektive v ideálním případě *je udrženo status quo*. Protiklad tvoří usídlené kultury, které jsou více náchylné ke změnám a evoluci, právě v důsledku setrvání na jedné lokalitě a tedy nutnosti přizpůsobit se změnám, na něž musí reagovat jinak než odchodem. Tento fakt potvrzuje i skutečnost, že právě nomádské společnosti dneška uchovávají v nejhojnější míře archaický způsob života, zatímco usazené komunity jsou vystaveny mnohem rychlejší modernizaci.

**KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA** nomádi; migrace; kulturní změna

**ABSTRACT** This contribution focuses on the relations of change, time and movement (migration) within human cultures. Particularly, the relation between migration and evolution will be investigated. It is argued, that all mentioned entities – change, time and movement – are intrinsically connected with each other and, from certain points of view, could be considered as identical. Thus, the nomad societies lack the necessity of cultural change (evolution) as a result of its perpetual change of place.

**KEY WORDS** nomads; migrations; cultural change

The most crucial conception I am going to deal with, is the change, as the fundamental expression of life (whether human, or animal or whatever else's). The change can be manifested as a change of place, what we call movement or, in the case of humans and animals, also migration. The movement and the change are also terms used when defining the category of time. According to Aristotle, time is a reckoned movement in regard to “before” and “after”. Analogically states another Greek philosopher Plotinus:

(Time is) ...*the Life of the Soul in movement as it passes from one stage of act or experience to another* (Plotinus 2010, eng. translation by MacKenna, S. – Page, B. S.).

Gavin Lucas asserts similarly:

*Time and change are close bedfellows – they are so related as concepts that, perhaps, it is hard to think of them apart* (Lucas 2005, 2).

So, for these authors, the change within the time emerges as a kind of evolution.

Let us have a look at the manner, in which change and movement manifest in the life of pastoral nomads; most distinctively (and most universally) as a change of place or as a movement through the landscape. There are obviously many patterns of movements, even in the frame of a single culture. The frequency of shifts depends mainly on ecological conditions. For example, there are families shifting more than four times in one year in contemporary Mongolia. On the other hand, some families have to shift just two times in a year, eventually they shift not at all, in countries offering more pastures. The migrations in Mongolia, according to my observation, are caused in normal circumstances by following factors<sup>1</sup>:

<sup>1</sup> I do not consider social reasons of movement

- Exhaustion of pastures
- Drying-up the water sources
- Inconvenient climatic conditions (searching sheltered valleys for winter time, leaving snow-covered pastures and so on).
- Hygienic reasons (?); (it is probably a consequence rather than a reason of shifts. Nevertheless, especially when a family owns a large number of stock, the organic pollution of place might be a reason for leaving it).

Most commonly, the shifts have a seasonal character (fundamental is summer and winter camp, in some cases also spring and autumn camps). Thus, for nomads means the change of time simultaneously the change of place. The motivation of the movement seems to be quite simple: the new site shall supply that, what the original site supplied till certain time, but (from various reasons) cannot any more. So, the life standard is maintained by the shift on another site: if the creek has dried up, let us move further against the stream, where is still water. If our stock has exhausted pastures, let us move there, where is plenty of grass. If it is getting cold, let us move in the valley, where the climate is milder. In other words, by the migration nomads restore that, what was former, the status quo is maintained. B. Chatwin describes the nature of nomadic shifts as follows:

Any nomad migration must be organized with precision and flexibility of a military campaign. Behind, the grass is shrivelling. Ahead, the passes may be blocked with snow. (...) Time and space are thus dissolved around each other: a month and a stretch of road are synonyms (Chatwin 1988, 205).

Chatwin's opinion about the merging of time and space in nomad societies could be accepted in some respect, but only if we understand time as seasonal changing. Winter than means sheltered valley, spring the particular journey from this valley to summer pastures, summer means highly situated pastures and the autumn means the journey back to the winter camp in the valley. But if we consider time in a more general level as a change, than the change of place averts the undesirable change of life conditions.

In contrast to sedentary, and particularly agricultural cultures, which are forced to adapt to the time cycles, to the periods of plenty and scarceness, nomads have the advantage of a kind of “manipulation” with the time. Obviously, they are not out of the time flow and seasons changes, but they eliminate in a great extent consequences of these changes by the movement through the space. If nomads move in the well established manner through the landscape, they live, in the ideal case, in the never-ceasing plenitude. They remain within the perpetual and plentiful “NOW”, which is nevertheless compensated by their lack of stable home. In other words, the change within the space (the cyclic changing of sites) compensates the “immobility”, the lack of change in the time.

The aspects of nomadism could be found in many various cultural contexts and their diversity illuminates the essence of nomadism from different points of view and so afford much more holistic image. R. Cribb states pregnantly:

*The search for a fully nomadic society should be abandoned in*

*favour of an approach which recognizes nomadic tendencies manifested in varying degrees in a wide range of societies and communities* (Cribb 2004, 16).

Beyond purely nomadic cultures we can see nomadic tendencies from this perspective in:

1. Cultures in „exodus“ – i.e. culture begins to move (whether actively or passively) outwards its original territory – the migration into new areas starts (for example the invasions of Cimmerians, Scyths, Huns, Mongols, Hungarians, Turks and others westwards, or forced migrations during the Migration Period etc).

2. Mobile parts in the frame of sedentary cultures (pilgrims, wandering monks, formerly Gypsies, merchants, communal shepherds...)

Even in these different cases, similarly to movement of nomadic families described above, the considerable consequence (and reason too) of migration is the elimination of change. This general rule, which could sound like: “change yourself or leave” is perceptible throughout all human history. By the change of place people paid the price for keeping their identity at every time. Many historical events, considering very often the religious identity, can be taken as examples. The choice of the Czech Protestants after the White Mountain battle is one of the purest examples in Czech history: whether they change their belief and stay in homeland or they keep their religion and pay for it by losing homeland. The case of Jews is illustrative as well. The Jew was originally a name of Judea (Iúdaïos in Greece) inhabitants, but since the overthrow from Romans in 70 A.D. when the Jews dispersed over all then world, all people accounted themselves as followers of judaism are called by this name, without any geographical restrictions (Fouillox 1992, 259). Ahasver, the permanently vagrant Jew, becomes then the “archetypal Jew”.

Thus, migrations prevent or considerably slow down evolution, which would be unavoidable when staying on the original site. Ibn Chaldun (1332–1406), the Arabian historian, does not attribute the possibility of evolution and progress at all when he designated nomadism as unprogressive phenomenon (cited in: Berman 2000, 162). This issue is very illustrative in etymological perspective as well: the English word progress (from latin progression) and the Czech word pokrok comes from all these languages from terms of movement (stalk, go ahead). B. Chatwin cites that the term progress in Middle English meant a ‘journey’ particularly a ‘seasonal journey’ or ‘circuit’ (1988, 219). Thus, the evolution and progress, the change in any other field of the nomadic life may be limited as a result of their “physical” mobility.

Ibn Chaldun regarded the nomadic life style (what he calls “badawa”) as opposite to the sedentary and agricultural life style (“hadara”), what solely, according him, can lead to civilisation (cited in: Berman 2000, 162).

The movement, on the one hand, enables to keep one's cultural expression unchanged, on the other hand it relieves from necessity of adaptation to new conditions, from change and progress further in evolution (which I state entirely without any positive or negative appreciation).

Type of culture	SPACE	TIME
Mobile culture	Change = migration	“NOW”
Sedentary culture	“HERE”	Change = evolution

Tab. 1. The relation between changes in space and time in mobile and sedentary cultures.

It is not by a change, that groups living in extremely archaic life style called often “people of Stone Age” (generally the Palaeolithic is meant by it) are almost entirely hunters and gatherers, i.e. mobile groups (rests of San’s population, Australian Aborigines, some ethnic groups on Papua New Guinea). Such people live in “stone age” even today, as thousands years before, in proven and unchanged life-style. But, on the contrary, there are no people, which could be compared for example to Bronze Age populations from the perspective of level of civilisation. This may seem paradoxical on the first sight – the common human experience forces us to believe the “logic” rule, that new phenomena are prospering, the older ones are disappearing steadily, and the oldest are long-ago lost. The reason is evident; the archaic cultures, if sedentary (for example those from Bronze Age), were predestined to evolution due to their sedentism. The relation between changes in space and time in mobile and sedentary cultures might be expressed by table 1.

The mobile cultures live just in eternal “now”, whereas for sedentary societies the time presents a complex flow of changes. And on the contrary, fully sedentary populations perceive the space unchangeably as “here”, whereas the nomad’s perception of space is much more complicated (see also: Čermáková 2006).

How are the mobile cultures actually? Most importantly, they evince a significant resistance against changes, in some cases there is actually no evolution (the contemporary hunters and gatherers “people of stone age”). Present-day nomadic peasants are more inclinable to changes in accord with extent of their mobility. Relevant is actual mobility, not the factual distances, surmount by the particular group.

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